

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

AUTHOR OF "A PRINCE OF SINNERS," "THE MASTER MUMMER," "CONSPIRATORS," ETC.

BEING THE THIRD OF THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF
MR. STANLEY BROOKE, THE DELIBERATE DETECTIVE

ILLUSTRATED BY J. SCOTT WILLIAMS

"CAN I speak to you for a moment, sir, if you please?"

The Hon. Stanley Brooke, who had just left the booking-office at Covent Garden Theater and was passing under the portico, turned around at the words, indifferently curious.

A man had touched him upon the arm and stood by his side now, patiently waiting for a reply. At first glance he seemed entirely of the usual type. His clothes were shabby, his expression furtive, his smooth civility of the servile order. He was small, almost undersized; pallid, with narrow lips and protruding chin. The more Brooke looked at him, the less he liked his appearance.

"Do I look the sort of person likely to give money to a man who is out of work, with a wife just recovering from an operation?" he asked patiently.

"It isn't your appearance made me speak to you," the man replied quickly. "It's the fact that you're the Hon. Stanley Brooke, sir."

"You have the advantage of me," Brooke remarked.

"My name wouldn't interest you," the man continued hurriedly. "I'm cadging, right enough, but not in the way you think. I've heard them talking about you—some one pointed you out in Herbert's bar. When I saw you coming out of the booking-office at the theater there I made up my mind to speak to you. You take an interest in queer things and places, don't you?"

"To a certain extent I do—and queer people," Brooke assented.

The man moved a trifle nearer. More than ever, as he stood there, with his over-coat buttoned up to his chin, looking half fearfully around, he seemed like some hunted animal.

"I could tell you something," he said, "if I had a chance. Will you come to my room to-night, any time after nine—No. 14 Hender Street, off Long Acre—straight up the stairs? There's my name chalked on the door—Robinson."

"What am I to come for?" Brooke asked.

"I'll put you onto something," the man replied, dropping his voice a little—"put you onto a job."

"I think," Brooke remarked thoughtfully, "that if any exchange of hospitalities is to take place between us, I would rather be host. You can come and see me, if you like, at my rooms—No. 10 Peter Street—between seven and eight this evening."

"It wouldn't be any good," the man replied. "What I want to tell you I can only tell you in my room. I dare not come up to the West End, either. I should be followed. You don't run any risk. It's simply a bit of money I want, and you shall have value for it, but I don't want to be seen with you."

Brooke scratched his chin thoughtfully for a moment. It was raining slightly, and he noticed that the man had crept beneath the shelter of his umbrella. His desire to



avoid observation was certainly not assumed.

"I know nothing of you," Brooke remarked, "and there are obvious objections to my visiting you in Long Acre. For anything I know, you may be a black-mailer or a thief, or any sort of bad character. Will you come to me if I stand a taxicab?"

"I won't," the man answered. "I tell you it's only from my room you can understand what I want to put before you. You've nothing to be afraid of. I live alone there with my sister. There's no one else on the premises. You could double me up, if I tried to rob you, with one hand. Say you'll come to-night. Don't put it off. It's worth while."

"I'll come," Brooke promised.

The man moved away. Brooke turned

around and watched him shuffle across the road.

"Let myself in for something!" he sighed.

It happened to be an evening without any engagements for Brooke. He dined in his rooms without changing his clothes, wrote a line or two upon half a sheet of note-paper, with the address to which he was going and the reasons for his visit, and left it upon the table, as was his custom when he was bound upon any unsavory errand.

At nine o'clock he walked eastward, turned into Long Acre, and discovered Hender Street without any particular difficulty. No. 16 consisted of an automobile showroom on the ground floor, which was now closed.

An open door by the side led him to a flight of stairs, at the top of which, as he had been advised, he found the word "Robinson" written in white chalk upon an uninviting-looking panel from which most of the paint seemed to have been scraped off.

He had scarcely knocked before the door was opened from inside. The little man who had accosted him in the street was standing there. He almost dragged Brooke in, stood for a moment listening, then closed the door.

"Did you happen to notice whether any one saw you come in?" he asked quickly.

"So far as I could see, the street was empty," Brooke replied.

He stood looking around him with some curiosity. The room was barely furnished, lit by one common lamp, close to which, upon an uncovered deal table, was a worn and battered typewriter. Seated before it was a girl.

She turned her head at his approach and looked at him. She was very pale, but there were about her appearance contradictions which puzzled Brooke. She wore a crimson serge dress, which gave her a

general impression of tawdriness. Her hands were well-shaped and white, however; her hair neatly arranged.

The hat which hung on a peg by her side—a most dejected-looking piece of millinery—was trimmed with flowers of faded brilliance. Still when she looked at him, curiously, yet with a certain indifference, he was surprised at the quality of her eyes.

"It's my sister," the man explained. "She gets a little typing sometimes, as you see. One of the offices sends her some work."

"And what do you do for a living?" Brooke inquired.

The man hesitated.

"Anything," he replied, a little defiantly. "I've been in prison three times. I expect I shall be in again before long. Sit down, sir, if you will."

Brooke looked at the one wooden chair and shook his head.

"Thanks," he said, "I'd rather stand. Please be as brief as possible."

"You've nothing to be afraid of," the man declared, with the first note of resentment in his tone.

"Possibly not," Brooke agreed, watching the girl. "You brought me here, though, and I want to know what for."

The little man cleared his throat.

"It's the house next door," he said. "It's locked up in front—bolts and bars across the window. The back entrance is locked, too. It's been empty for months. The Miller Automobile Company had it and failed."

"Well?" Brooke remarked. "I saw that it was empty—dust all over the windows. What about it?"

"Step this way a moment, sir."

Brooke obeyed the summons. The man was standing close to the wall by the side of the fireplace.

"This house and the next one were connected a few years ago," he said. "This wall has only been built up lately. It's nothing but lath and plaster. Look here."

He removed a picture, cut out from some illustrated paper, which had been pinned upon the wall. From the spot which it had covered he took out a brick, thrust his arm in, and pulled out two more. He laid them softly upon the floor. All the time he was almost holding his breath.

"Stoop down and look!"

Brooke obeyed him. There was one

more brick apparently still remaining, but the mortar had slipped away, and from all around it came a little gleam of dull light.

"Get your head as near as you can," Robinson whispered. "Listen!"

Brooke obeyed. At first he heard nothing, however. There was some sort of light in the room, but no sound. He was on the point of withdrawing his head when the silence was suddenly broken. A man's voice was heard—a man's voice which seemed to come with queer, rolling regularity.

Brooke listened hard, but was unable to make out any word. Then there was silence, broken almost immediately by the sound of several voices speaking in unison. This time there seemed to be no doubt about it. The reply was a sort of monotonous chant. One man had spoken and others had replied. Brooke listened with more interest. The same thing happened several times. Then again there was silence. Brooke stepped away from the wall.

"What on earth is it all about?" he asked.

The man Robinson shook his head.

"I know nothing," he said, and his voice sounded weak and faint. "Only, if you go down-stairs, you will find that the entrance to the house is locked and barred, and the back entrance is locked, too. Neither I nor any one else sees people enter. And yet there is that!"

Brooke brushed the dust from his clothes.

"It is certainly curious," he admitted. "What do you think about it, young lady?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him.

"All that I think of it is," she said, "that it is safer in this world, and in this little corner of London, to mind one's own business. That is what I tell my brother."

"Can one live by minding one's own business?" Robinson exclaimed excitedly. "Don't laugh—I was a gentleman once. I'm anything you like now, down to a gutter thief, but I have something of the tastes left. I want money—God knows how I want it!"

"What is your proposition?" Brooke inquired.

"Not much of a one, anyway. There's a mystery there, and you're a lover of mysteries. I've disclosed it to you, as much as I know of or dare know. Help yourself and pay me. It ought to be worth

a ten-pound note to you. You're rich, they say, and just go round looking for adventures. You can have all the adventure you like if you can get into that room. I know nothing about it, but I'll guarantee that. Give me a tenner."

"Do you propose to assist me in any further steps I might take toward the elucidation of this affair?" Brooke asked curiously.

The man began to shake as though he had an ague.

"Not for my life!" he declared. "I've seen too many queer things in this city. If you're curious, I'm not."

"What about your room here?"

"Your last visit," Robinson insisted feverishly. "I'm not going to be connected with anything that happens. Do you hear? I tell you I won't be! I just want a ten-pound note from you, and out you go and forget you've ever seen me. And if you want excitement—my God! you'll have value for your money!"

Brooke shook his head.

"You are a little mistaken as to my vocation and tastes," he explained. "I am not a curious person. If any one consults me, and I can help him, I do so. On the other hand, I should say that an affair like this, with which I am not connected in any way, is a matter either for the police or for the tenants of the flat."

"You mean you won't do anything?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," Brooke replied, taking up his hat. "If you will accept a sovereign as a loan or gift or whatever you like to call it, it is yours, with pleasure. So far as I am concerned, that is the end of the matter."

The man was obviously disappointed. He accepted the sovereign, however, with eagerness.

"My advice to you would be," Brooke concluded, as he prepared to depart, "to give information to the police as to anything that may be going on in the next house. They will probably reward you, if your information turns out to be worth anything."

Robinson said nothing, but his face seemed to grow tense.

"I may have to," he muttered. "I'm up against it. I want money. After all, one's life isn't worth much if one starves. Go down quietly, please."

Brooke turned toward the girl, but she was already bending over her work. He

lingered upon the threshold. There was a queer sort of tired grace in the stiff, unbending lines of her figure.

"Good night, young lady," he said pleasantly.

"Good night!" she replied, without raising her head.

Brooke strolled back down Hender Street into Long Acre and returned to his rooms. Once or twice he paused as though to look into a shop-window, but he was not able on that night to verify absolutely his suspicions.

Yet from the moment he left the little house in Hender Street he had the impression that he was being followed. The same idea came to him once or twice during the next few days. He had always the uncomfortable sense that he was under surveillance.

He thought little more of his visit. There were possibly lawbreakers of some sort in the place—very likely by arrangement with the landlord. In any case, the affair did not greatly interest him. It was not until the third day, when he picked up the morning paper and read that a man named Robinson had been found dead on the Embankment, within a dozen paces of Scotland Yard, that he felt any real interest in the matter.

Late that afternoon Brooke found his way once more to the house in Hender Street. He passed along the passage, climbed the stairs, and knocked at the door. The girl's tired voice bade him enter. She did not rise from her seat. She simply glanced around as he entered. He noticed with a little thrill of horror that she was still wearing the crimson-colored gown.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

He closed the door behind him. She awaited an answer to her question with her fingers still resting upon the keys.

"Is this true that I have read in the papers about your brother?" he inquired gravely.

"It is true," she answered. "What of it?"

Brooke was a little staggered. Her utter lifelessness of tone and manner was incredible. It was as though she were without feelings or any sort of emotion.

"It is a very terrible thing," he said. "I am very sorry for you."

"Why are you sorry?" she asked. "And why is it a very terrible thing? Death

may seem terrible enough to you people who lead happy lives. To us, who are being broken hour after hour upon the wheel, death is the night which is all we have to look forward to."

He sensed a chill in his blood. Somehow he felt that ordinary forms of speech were wholly out of place with this remarkable young woman. She had leaned a little back in her chair, however, as though willing to desist, for a moment, from her labors.

"Are you going to remain here?" he asked, a little diffidently.

She looked at him with cold scrutiny.

"Whether I live here or elsewhere, whether I choose

most thrilling he had ever heard. He had never realized more completely the presence of tragedy. He moved a little nearer to her.

"Look here!" he exclaimed; "doesn't this thing move you? Doesn't it seem terrible to you? Can you sit there and tell me, without the slightest emotion, that your brother was murdered?"



to live at all or to die," she remarked, "is no concern of a stranger."

"I am sorry if I have offended you," he began.

"Will you kindly tell me why you have come?" she interrupted. "You will be able to go the sooner."

"I have come," he explained, "because I want to know what you think about your brother's death. The papers are divided in their opinion. Some say that he fell down and got concussion of the brain; others seem to think that he was murdered."

"If it interests you to know the truth," she said, "he was murdered on his way to give information at Scotland Yard about the next house."

Her matter-of-fact words, delivered in her quiet, tired tone, seemed to Brooke the

"He knew very well what would happen," she replied. "He has known for weeks what would happen if he approached the police. That is why he chose rather to come to you; only, you see, you very wisely declined to meddle in an affair which has nothing to do with you."

"Then what, in God's name, is this affair?" he demanded. "Who are these people who murder rather than have information as to their doings given to the police? And how did your brother become connected with them?"

"Because," she replied, "my brother was employed by one of them until he was thrown out for unworthiness."

"For unworthiness?" Brooke muttered. She nodded.

"There is honor, you know, among thieves and criminals and sinners of every description," she said. "My brother had sunk so low that, although he was willing to pilfer himself, to rob in any way, to rob with violence if he had the strength or the courage, he was yet equally willing to

make money by giving away those whose sins were of a different order to his. He had sunk so low that a man can sink no lower."

"He is dead!" Brooke whispered, shivering. "Don't you think you should remember that?"

"I have no sentiment," she answered scornfully. "For this last year I have known him to be one of the lowest things that crawls. You are surprised, perhaps, that I am not in black, weeping over his memory. The earth is a cleaner place for his absence. That is all that I feel about his death."

"Nothing else?"

"Perhaps one little spark of admiration," she replied defiantly, "for the men who have the courage to remove such as he from their path."

Brooke had lost his imperturbability. He was horrified, and showed it. He tried one counterstroke, however.

"If," he asked, "your point of view is as you suggest, why do you sit here grinding out a miserable living from that battered old typewriter? Why don't you join the great crowd of those who fatten upon the fools of the earth?"

She turned and faced him. Something very grim, but which might almost have developed into a smile, trembled at the corners of her lips.



BROOKE LISTENED HARD, BUT WAS UNABLE TO MAKE OUT ANY WORD

"Because," she told him, "I do not happen to have come into contact with any illegal means of earning my livelihood. The ordinary methods of my sex, unfortunately, do not appeal to me. I have no ideals, I do not value character a straw, but I have certain tastes and preferences, the gratification of which keeps me from —any word you choose to give it," she added, looking him full in the eyes.

"I speak, perhaps, rather of the past than of the present," she continued. "I am older now and a little tired. There were times when I was considered good-looking. May I ask whether you intend to keep me much longer answering your questions?"

"I will pay you for your time," Brooke declared briskly.

"Thank you," she replied, "I accept payment for the work I do. This isn't work."

"So you are proud," he remarked. "You would like to be a criminal, but you won't take money, you tell me."

She shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

"You belong to those who don't understand," she said shortly. "Any one can see that you are half a fool."

"I am going to prove," Brooke retorted, "that I am a whole one. I am going to solve the mystery of the next house."

For a single second a shadow of something new appeared in her face.

"If I were you," she advised, "I wouldn't."

"You wouldn't care to help, then?"

"I should not!"

"Do you mind if I listen once more at the wall?"

"You can do as you like," she answered indifferently.

Brooke made his way

to the spot which Robinson had showed him, carefully removed the bricks, and listened. There was, without doubt, some one in the adjoining room. One voice only was audible—the voice of one man apparently speaking in a monotonous sing-song, as though he were delivering some sort of an address.

Punctuated by those level sentences, every now and then came a fainter sound, to which Brooke listened with something like dismay. It was like the moan of an animal—or was it a child in pain? He replaced the bricks.

"I wonder," he said to the girl, "whether the police have ever searched that house?"

"Why not save your own skin and go and ask them to?" she suggested.

Brooke came and stood by the side of her typewriter.

"Listen," he continued; "I am going through with this little adventure myself. Isn't there anything you can tell me?"

"Why should I?" she asked defiantly. "If they are criminals who meet there, why should I be on your side more than theirs? I am a fragment of the débris of the world myself."

"You are not," he answered steadily. "You have courage. I believe that you have other gifts."

She set her teeth.

"In any case," she declared briskly, "I have nothing to tell you. If you want my advice, you've had it, but I'll give it you again. Don't meddle in things that don't concern you."

"Will you do some typewriting for me?" Brooke asked.

"At ninepence a thousand words and threepence extra for carbon copies," she assented. "I'd rather do it for any one else. That doesn't matter."

"I will take the liberty, then," Brooke replied, moving toward the door, "of coming to see you later on."

Again, as he left the house, Brooke was conscious that he was being shadowed. He stopped once or twice and retraced his steps, but he was never able definitely to decide whence came the subtle, ever-present feeling.

Finally, with a shrug of the shoulders, he abandoned his half-formed intention of examining the premises from the outside and, turning into Long Acre, took a taxi-cab back to his rooms.

On the hall table was a letter addressed to him in a bold masculine handwriting and with a London postmark. He opened it at once. A single line written in thick, black ink, with several notes of exclamation, seemed to stare up at him from the half-sheet of paper:

Keep away from Hender Street, Mr. Brooke!!!!

Brooke thrust the letter into his pocket. At last he had some definite proof that he was not wasting his time. In the morning he paid a visit to the house-agents and learned that the empty house in question had been leased to the manager of the defunct automobile company, who was now abroad. The agreement had one year to run, and the agents had had no notice of any subletting.

Brooke walked from their offices to Hender Street. Without any attempt at concealment, he examined the front of the house. It was not only locked and barricaded, but there was dust upon the fastenings. He made his way to the back entrance. The gate leading into the little strip of asphalt was fastened with a chain. There was no sign that it had been disturbed for a long time.

He made his way to the front again. Suddenly the door of the adjoining house was opened and a man was literally thrown into the street. Brooke caught a glimpse of a negro in the background—a stern and ferocious-looking figure. Then the door was closed.

A thin, weedy-looking young man picked himself up from the ground, took off his spectacles to be sure that they were not broken, and began to knock the dust off his clothes. He saw Brooke regarding him with astonishment, and smiled faintly.

"Just my luck to run up against this sort of thing!" he exclaimed. "All in the day's work, though."

"Did you annoy any one?" Brooke inquired.

"It seems so," the young man answered. "I am a reporter on the *Weekly Post*, and I went to interview Kinsey Brand."

"The African traveler?" Brooke asked quickly.

The young man nodded. They had fallen into step together and set their faces southward.

"Yes," he replied. "That was his servant who just hurried me out. He's got

two of them. He need never be afraid of burglars with two beauties like that on the premises!"

"Better have a drink," Brooke suggested—"pull you together."

The young man assented readily. They entered a bar and sat on high stools.

"What did you want to interview Kinsey Brand about?" Brooke asked.

"Oh, they say he's brought home a new religion—discovered it among the natives, where they have been practising it for two thousand years," the young man continued. "All the magazines have tried to get him to write about it, but he won't, and every reporter in London has tried to get at him, unsuccessfully. They generally end where I did!"

"This," Brooke murmured, "is very interesting."

The young man felt his back.

"What I should like to do," he declared, "would be to get Jack Johnson to stroll in there with a note-book and ask him a few questions. As a matter of fact, I never saw Kinsey Brand at all. I was just giving the negro half a sovereign when I heard a voice that sounded like a bellow, and out I went."

"Queer place for the man to live," Brooke remarked.

"He's got a bit of money, too, I should think," the reporter continued. "Lots of skins and things about the place. Smelled like a corner of the zoological gardens."

"What is this religion—do you know?" Brooke asked.

"No idea," the young man answered. "Seems to make 'em tolerably muscular! The only reporter who got Brand to say a word was Ted Foales, of the *Express*. He told him that all he wanted to do was to be left alone; that he wanted neither converts nor critics."

"It's not a money-making job, then," Brooke remarked thoughtfully.

"About the only religion that ain't," the young man murmured, looking into the bottom of his empty glass. "I don't know that I blame 'em, either. If I'd got a brand-new religion to foist on the world, I'd run it for all it was worth. One would be able to stand a gentleman a drink then, in return for any little civility one might receive."

Brooke took the hint and the young man's glass was replenished.

"Between you and me," the latter said, moving his stool a little closer to Brooke's,

"if I had the time and the money and the physique and the courage I should like to stick to this Kinsey Brand. There are some queer stories going about."

"They say he went mad on the voyage home from West Africa, and that he brought home a negro and a native priest. If so, he's got 'em in that house. While I was there I heard a man making noises in a tongue which made you feel as though you were in a monkey forest. The only visitors he ever has are three or four old cronies, all West Africans, and they almost live in the place."

"It all sounds very mysterious."

"I was too scared to look about me much," the young man continued; "but just inside that passage what do you think there was, hanging down from the ceiling? A long, double-edged knife, hung by a piece of gold thread! The knife was stained all over, and I'll swear it was blood. Nice, cheerful sight to greet you when you step in!"

"I should imagine," Brooke remarked, "that Mr. Kinsey Brand's instincts are not hospitable."

The young man grunted.

"Anyway, I've done with him," he declared. "Any one else can take up the job!"

At ten o'clock that night Brooke sat in his rooms with an open letter and a pile of newspapers by his side. The former he had just received from the librarian of a large book-shop from whom he made occasional purchases. It was not very long, but its contents were interesting:

DEAR SIR:

I am sending you the file of papers, procured with great difficulty, and I beg that you will take every care of them. It is a very remarkable circumstance that the letters from Mr. Kinsey Brand, for which the *Times* was paying a large sum, ceased abruptly on the eve of his projected visit to one of the most interesting spots in Africa. Since then, notwithstanding the large offers which have been made to him, Mr. Kinsey Brand has not, so far as we know, set his hand to paper at all, either in the form of articles or volume. It is understood that his health was affected by privations, and that he had no further inclination to write of his travels. The affair, however, is in some respects mysterious, and I may say that many efforts have been made, even up to the last few weeks, to obtain some explanation.

Faithfully yours,

S. CLOWES.

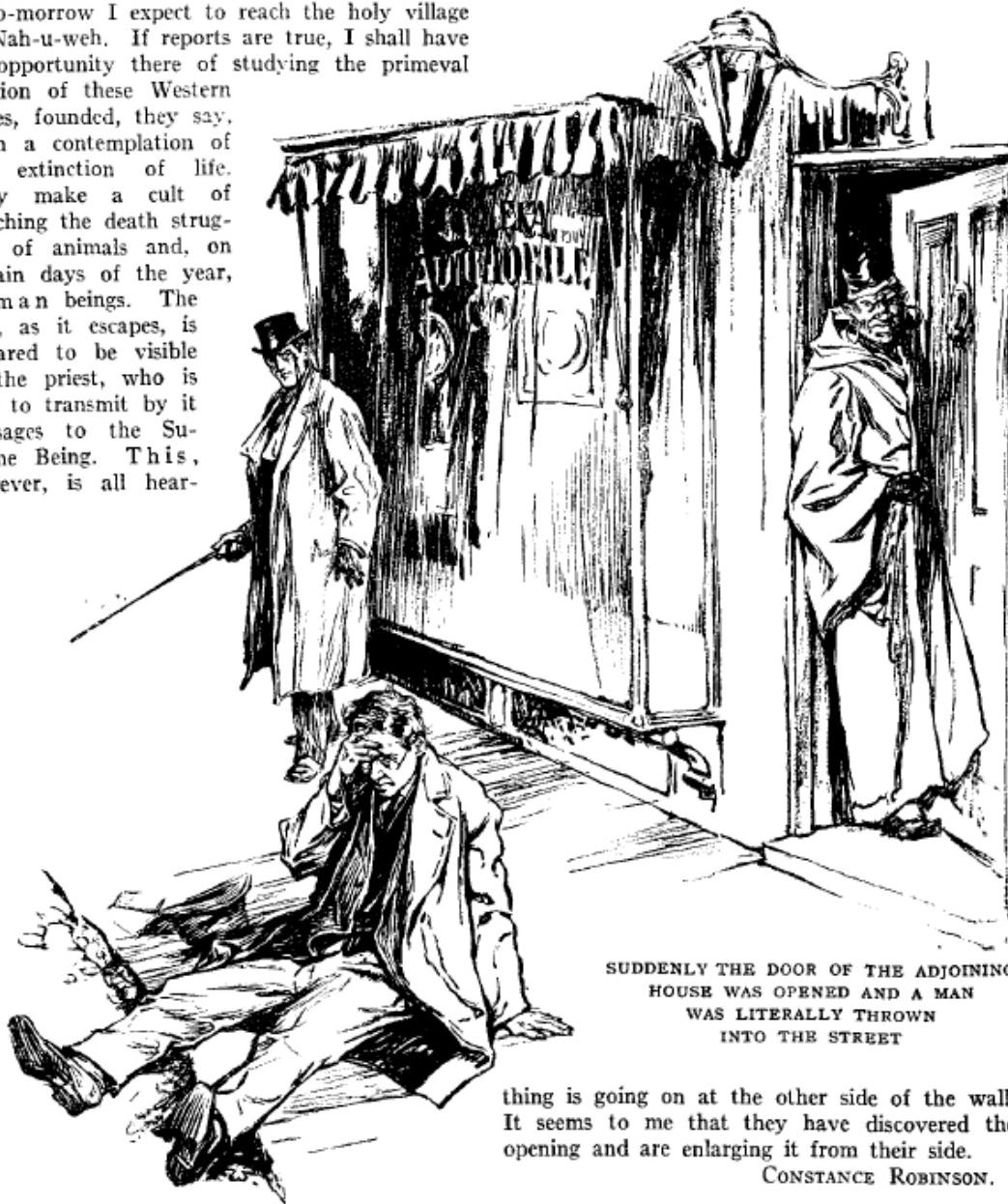
The interest of the newspapers culminated in the issue of latest date. For the second or third time Brooke was reading some extracts of a letter written about two years ago and signed "Kinsey Brand":

To-morrow I expect to reach the holy village of Nah-u-weh. If reports are true, I shall have an opportunity there of studying the primeval religion of these Western tribes, founded, they say, upon a contemplation of the extinction of life. They make a cult of watching the death struggles of animals and, on certain days of the year, human beings. The soul, as it escapes, is declared to be visible to the priest, who is able to transmit by it messages to the Supreme Being. This, however, is all hear-

"Urgent." He tore it open and read the following:

MR. BROOKE:

If you are still interested in the house next door, you had better come here at once. Some-



say. I shall know more about it in my next letter.

There was a knock at the door. Brooke's servant entered, bearing a note. Brooke took it and glanced at it, carelessly at first and then with a sudden interest. It was addressed to him in typewritten characters, and in the corner it was marked

thing is going on at the other side of the wall. It seems to me that they have discovered the opening and are enlarging it from their side.

CONSTANCE ROBINSON.

Brooke sprang to his feet, made a few hasty preparations, took a taxicab to the corner of Hender Street, passed up the passage and the stairs, and knocked at the door above. There was no reply.

He turned the handle and entered.

The room was empty.

On the floor was the typewriter, lying on its side, broken. By the side of the wall were half a dozen loose bricks and a

quantity of plaster. There was a hole in the wall, stuffed up with paper, large enough for a man to pass through.

Brooke stood for a moment, rooted to the spot. Caught on a corner of the fender was a torn fragment of something red. He recognized it at once—it was a portion of the girl's dress.

Then, as he stood there slowly collecting his senses, he distinctly heard a low, half-stifled moan from the interior of the room beyond. The sound suddenly awakened his energies. He scarcely paused for thought.

He tore off his overcoat and

his hand; not far off stood a gaunt, strange-looking person, with parchment-white skin and burning eyes, whom Brooke recognized in an instant, from his pictures, as Kinsey Brand, the explorer.

Behind the two men a gigantic negro was standing with lamps in his hands, and in front of them the girl, bound with cords which cut deeply into her dress, was lying stretched upon a block of wood.



THREE HAD THE AIR AND ATTITUDE OF SPECTATORS

coat, threw himself on all fours, and made one plunge at the mass of paper which alone blocked the opening. He was through in a moment and on his feet in the room on the other side of the wall before any one could seize him.

For a few seconds there was a grim and ghastly silence. Brooke looked around him wildly. The apartment was unfurnished, save that the floor was covered with thick rugs, and three benches were placed near the farther wall. There were six men present altogether, three of whom were sitting with folded arms upon the farthest bench. They had the air and attitude of spectators.

Directly facing them was a man as black as ink, dressed in a yellow robe, and holding a long knife of thin blue steel in

Her face was absolutely colorless, her eyes black and staring.

There was a curious, sickly odor which seemed to come from the lamps which the negro was swinging. All these things were before Brooke like a flash. For some reason or other, probably owing to the fact that the ceremony at which they were assisting had reached what to them was its most impressive stage, no one stirred from his place during those few seconds. Brooke had time to withdraw his hand from his hip pocket. He stood there with his feet firmly planted upon the ground and his back to the wall. In his hand the revolver glittered like silver in the light of the red flame. Then, without removing his eyes from the priest, he shouted as though to unseen followers.

"Come on, you men! I've got them! They are all here! See that the house is surrounded!"

The priest, for such he seemed to be, suddenly raised the knife which he was holding and crouched as though for a spring at the intruder. Brooke, who had never shot at a human being in his life, felt scarcely a tremor as he pulled the trigger of his revolver and saw the man go swaying over with a hideous cry and his hands above his head.

His downfall, the flash and report of the revolver, seemed to spread confusion among the remaining occupants of the room. The three spectators, followed by the negro, rushed for the door. Brand re-

cry—a denunciation, perhaps, for one hand was lifted to the ceiling. Then he, too, turned and left, walking with a strange dignity.

Brooke, for the first few seconds, was dazed. Then he seized the knife and commenced to cut the cords which bound the girl. Once he paused. The atmosphere had become unbearable.

The sound below was unmistakable—the crackling and roaring of flames. He glanced at the window. A long tongue of red fire had shot up. He hacked furiously at the rope. The girl was almost fainting.

"Get through the hole," he begged, "if you can. Can you crawl?"

She nodded. He dragged her toward the opening. As he pushed her through he glanced back. A great zigzag crack had spread itself out across the opposite wall and a hissing puff of smoke rushed in.

Outside he could hear the calls in the streets and the throb of the fire-engine. The girl seemed suddenly inert. She was only half-way through.

"Make an effort!" he shouted.

She disappeared. He flung himself into the opening. He, too, reached the other side. The girl was half on her feet, swaying.

"Don't faint," he implored. "Cling to me. We must make a rush for the stairs."

"Who said anything about fainting?" she replied. "Come on!"

They rushed for the stairs, his arm around her. Below they could hear the crashing of hatchets as the firemen forced their way into the next house. A volume of smoke met them, but they reached the street in safety. The crowds of people closing

in on either side cheered as they emerged from the house and made way. Some one helped her into a taxi. They drove off. She was only half conscious.

"My typewriter!" she murmured.

"We'll get a new one from the insur-



DIRECTLY FACING THEM A MAN BLACK AS INK, NOT FAR OFF A GAUNT,
STRANGE LOOKING PERSON, AND BEHIND THEM A GIGANTIC NEGRO

mained for a single moment glaring at Brooke.

Then he muttered something, something which sounded to Brooke at first like gibberish, and afterward like music, something which ended in a little impressive

ance company," Brooke whispered comfortingly. "Keep your courage up for a minute or two."

Her lips moved, but she had no strength to speak. Brooke drove to a nursing-home, where the matron was a friend of his, and where they willingly took her in.

At eleven o'clock the next morning Brooke called at the nursing-home. The girl was lying on the sofa in her room. She looked at him steadily as he came and sat by her side.

"Well?" she asked.

"The two Africans were burned," he told her quietly. "They had planned to destroy the place by fire if anything happened, but the flames spread too quickly and their own escape was cut off."

"What about the man Brand?"

"He was found dead in his room."

"And the three spectators?"

"They must have got away," he replied. "There were no other casualties. Tell me what happened."

"I was sitting at work," she said, "when I heard them boring at the wall. I wrote a note and went down into the street to find a boy to take it to you. When I got back the African was in the room. He seized me, put something over my mouth and dragged me through to the other side of the wall."

"They tied me to that block and chanted all sorts of strange things I couldn't understand. Just as you appeared the priest had lifted that knife as though he were going to stab me, and I heard Kinsey Brand cry out in English: 'Watch for her soul!'"

Brooke shuddered.

"They were all as mad as men could be," he declared.

"Will it be in the papers?"

He shook his head.

"No one would believe it! I think we'd better keep it to ourselves. Both houses were burned to the ground—completely destroyed."

She breathed a sigh of relief.

"What about my typewriter?" she asked weakly.

"Burned to ashes, and about time, too," he replied briskly. "The 'g' was crooked and the 'w' had a twist in the middle. You shall have a brand-new one and plenty of work as soon as you are able to start."

She fidgeted for a moment and frowned. Then she sighed. There was something a little pathetic in the abnegation of her ill manners.

"You are very kind," she said, her voice shaking a little—"you have been very kind indeed. You saved my life, too. I wanted to die, but not—like that!"

"You've got to make up your mind that it was all just a dream—a nightmare, if you like," Brooke declared cheerfully. "The program is three days here, three weeks at a branch of this place at Bournemouth. After that as much typewriting as you like. I can get you bushels of work."

She covered her eyes with her handkerchief as though weary. Her lips trembled. Brooke stole away.

